

Remarks at the North Atlantic Treaty Organization 50th Anniversary
Summit Dinner
April 23, 1999

Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to the White House and, again let me say, welcome to Washington and to the NATO Summit.

Some of you know that I am quite a fan of music. And I found a little-known bit of history related to the founding of NATO 50 years ago. When the original North Atlantic Treaty was signed, the United States Marine Band, which was in the auditorium playing for us today, was in the auditorium then, playing a group of songs from George Gershwin's famous opera, "Porgy and Bess." The two songs they played were "I Got Plenty of Nothing" and "It Ain't Necessarily So." Well, I think after 50 years we can still appreciate Gershwin, but the songs were poorly timed, because NATO has had plenty of substance, and its word has been necessarily so.

In 1949 when we entered NATO, it signaled a radical departure in America's history because we had been warned from the time of our first President, George Washington, against entangling alliances with other nations. But we learned the hard way after World War I that the warning was no longer valid in the 20th century.

In the last 50 years, all of us have become more and more involved with events beyond our borders because we have seen increasingly how they affect the lives of people within our borders and how the values we espouse at home must be defended abroad. That is in large measure what we are trying to do in Kosovo, to protect the innocent families, the children, and to stand for the values that we have stood for as an organization for 50 years now.

We owe a great debt of gratitude to our founders, to the generation of people after the

Second World War who constructed a world of freedom that stood against tyranny and eventually helped to end the cold war. We can best pay that debt by standing up for those values today, including meeting our responsibilities to the children and the future of southeastern Europe in the terrible suffering of Kosovo.

Mr. Secretary General, I want to say a special word of thanks to you for your steadfast leadership, for your continuing reminder to all of us that we must both do our duty and stay together as we do it. Tomorrow we will focus on Kosovo again, but we will also look to the larger issues of the 21st century. Again, I compliment you on your leadership, and I thank all of our colleagues for their input.

We will look back on this summit, I think, and say, "Well, it wasn't one of those traditional meetings, where we got to have a lot of fun and a lot of laughs, because we were so gravely concerned with the suffering of the people in the Balkans. But it was a profoundly important one because it reminded us of why we got started, what we have to do tomorrow, and what it is that gives our Alliance meaning in this present day."

I'd like to ask all of you to join me in a toast to Secretary General and Mrs. Solana, and to NATO and its future. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:30 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Secretary General Javier Solana of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, and his wife, Concepcion. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of Secretary General Solana.

Remarks at the Opening Session of the North Atlantic Council Summit
April 24, 1999

Thank you very much, Mr. Secretary General.

Yesterday we recalled NATO's history, embraced our new members, deepened our unity

and our determination to stand against ethnic cleansing in Kosovo and to build a broader transatlantic community that respects human

rights of all ethnic and religious groups and offers all Europeans the chance to build better lives together.

I want to begin by thanking the Secretary General for his leadership. I thank all of you for your leadership and your unity, the foreign and defense ministers, General Naumann and General Clark, and all the people in our governments who worked so hard to support our efforts. I know I speak for all of us when I say we are very proud of our men and women in uniform in the Balkans. And we remember today, especially, the three who are being held prisoner by Mr. Milosevic and who still have not received the Red Cross visits required by the Geneva Convention, even though he is on television in the United States saying they will receive them.

The crisis in Kosovo has underscored the importance of NATO and the imperative of modernizing our Alliance for 21st century challenges. Today we will embrace a comprehensive plan to do just that, so that NATO can advance security and freedom for another 50 years by

enhancing our capacity to address conflicts beyond our borders, by protecting our citizens from terrorism and weapons of mass destruction, by deepening our partnerships with other nations and helping new members enter through NATO's open doors. In preparing NATO for the 21st century, we will make our Alliance even stronger.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at approximately 9:23 a.m. in the Mellon Auditorium. In his remarks, he referred to Secretary General Javier Solana of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization; Gen. Klaus Naumann, chairman, NATO Military Committee; Gen. Wesley K. Clark, Supreme Allied Commander, Europe; President Slobodan Milosevic of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro); and Staff Sgt. Andrew A. Ramirez, USA, Staff Sgt. Christopher J. Stone, USA, and Specialist Steven M. Gonzales, USA, infantrymen in custody in Serbia. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of Secretary General Solana.

The President's Radio Address

April 24, 1999

Good morning. Tomorrow in church services all across America, we'll be thinking of those who lost their lives in Littleton, Colorado. This is a time for all Americans to pray for their families as well as those who were injured and their loved ones and all the people of the schools and the community.

It's also a time for all Americans to ask what we can do, as individuals and as a nation, to turn more young people from the path of violence; how we can take responsibility, each and every one of us, for the future of our children. We've seen far too many tragedies like the one at Columbine High School.

It's striking that these violent assaults on human life often illuminate the best of the human spirit. We marvel at the bravery of the fatally wounded teacher who led 40 students to safety. We look with admiration at the medics and the police officers who rushed to the scene to save lives; the clergy, the counselors, the local leaders who immediately began the painful proc-

ess of helping people to heal; and the parents and students who, in the face of hatred, refuse to return it.

At a moment of such terrible, terrible violence, these people didn't turn away, and we can't either. Instead, every one of us must take responsibility to counter the culture of violence.

Government must take responsibility. Next week I'll send to Congress two new bills to keep our children safe. First, we must do more to keep guns out of the hands of violent juveniles. My bill will crack down on gun shows and illegal gun trafficking, ban violent juveniles from ever being able to buy a gun, and close the loophole that lets juveniles own assault rifles.

Second, we must do more to prevent violence in our schools. My safe schools bill will help schools pay for more counselors and conflict resolution programs, more mentors, and more metal detectors. It also includes \$12 million for emergency teams, to help communities respond when tragedy strikes.